

## **RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**

After years of working the soil without regard for its future preservation, the Federal Government realized that steps must be taken to prevent our agricultural lands from becoming barren wastelands. The great dust bowls of the Midwest in the 1930's induced government involvement in soil conservation. In 1933, the Federal Soil Conservation Service was created primarily to attack the problems in the dust bowl areas. Once the Service was formed, however, it became apparent that the need for conservation practices was nationwide.

The original function of the Soil Conservation Service was to develop projects in selected problem areas so the landowners could observe firsthand what could be done to prevent erosion and promote soil preservation. The plan that the landowner observe how to establish good soil conservation practices can be established and then return to his land and initiate the needed conservation practices failed. While the landowners agreed that measures implemented by the Soil Conservation Service were necessary and ultimately beneficial to the individual landowners, they lacked the resources to initiate their own soil conservation plans.

As a result of the Soil Conservation Service's initial failure, a new plan was devised in an attempt to solve the problems of the individual landowner. The new plan utilized local government control in combating the problems of erosion and soil depletion. If local governmental agencies were established that would address the problems of the soil, then the Federal Government would offer free technical assistance in devising soil conservation districts as we know them today.

Sacramento has four Resource Conservation Districts as they are now called, pursuant to a change in the law in 1972. Lower Cosumnes Resource Conservation District protects the Delta Region of the County; Sloughouse Resource Conservation District protects the southeastern section of the County; and Florin Resource Conservation District protects the Florin area in the central section of the County. The Granite Resource Conservation District is located in the northeast Orangevale area and is inactive. Initially, the districts served small areas, but as time passed and awareness of the need for soil conservation practices spread, the districts began to process annexation proposals; therefore, the entire agricultural land in the southern sector of the County is now protected by one of the three active Resource Conservation Districts.

Each district has an elected five-member board of directors which works in conjunction with the Federal Soil Conservation Service. The district enters into a contract with the federal agency called a "Memorandum of Understanding." In the contract, the district lists resource conservation practices they plan to promote in their service area, and the federal agency lists the services available to assist districts. Each year the Soil Conservation Service and the Resource Conservation Districts together decide on the best use of the Soil Conservation Service staff's time allocated by the federal government for

assistance of Resource Conservation Districts. Together they draw up a work plan which identifies the projects to be given priority that year.

Resource Conservation District Activities specifically include: control of runoff water, prevention or control of soil erosion, development and distribution of water, improvement of land capabilities, dissemination of information and the conducting of demonstration projects in soil conservation. Resource Conservation Districts can, with the consent of the public agency or person owning the land, construct terraces, levees, dams, plant trees, shrubs, and other vegetation. The districts also promote wildlife conservation.

The five-member board of directors must be landowners, or resident agents of such landowners, of the property defined within the district boundaries. They are elected at large for four-year terms. In the event that no one files for the election, the Board of Supervisors may appoint board members. The districts are currently financed primarily through the County tax allotments, land leases, and interest payments on their accounts. Resource Conservation in Sacramento County is provided mostly for agricultural lands. However, Resource Conservation Districts in other counties effectively serve urban territory—primarily in erosion control and conservation education. The entire southern sector of Sacramento County is now served by one of the three active conservation districts. These districts address the problems of individual landowners, however, this practice is decreasing as urbanization continues to spread into the present district boundaries.

The one remaining agricultural area in Sacramento County not served by a Resource Conservation District is the Natomas Area. Resource conservation practices, however, have been undertaken by the individual landowners in the area. A resource conservation district has never existed in this area.